

**OCS POLICY COMMITTEE**  
**EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SUBCOMMITTEE**  
**Working Notes on Education and Outreach**

**Why education and outreach are needed**

*What the public thinks about issues is important and affects public policy. Energy awareness in general, however, seems to be lacking, and issues involving offshore oil and natural gas may be poorly understood.*

Energy awareness seems motivated primarily by a sense of crisis, whether price and availability or environmental disaster. Whether the “crisis” is stimulated by the threat of war in the Middle East, national security issues, inflation, seasonal market fluctuations, or a major spill, as soon as it passes – and the price of gasoline, home heating oil, natural gas or electricity goes down, with ample supply re-established, or the spill is cleaned up – interest in the topic wanes. Energy awareness has not been sustainable, at least under present education and outreach efforts, in the sense that environmental awareness is. People seem to know when Earth Day is, but they don’t know about Energy Awareness Month (which is October – the whole month).

When students learn about energy in school, it’s generally about either conservation, which is important and appropriate, or solar or wind, or a new technology that holds great promise, but is not right around the corner. Children and others are left with the impression that it’s just a matter of choice between more conventional sources, such as fossil fuels, and these alternatives. It’s not that simple and the public deserves to know it.

Teachers generally teach to textbooks. If a textbook discussion of our oceans includes two pages on whales and dolphins, compared to two sentences on the offshore oil and natural gas industry, teachers typically will devote proportionate amounts of time unless they have other resources on the topic. Usually there are non-oil and natural gas people who edit textbooks in science and write the sections on offshore energy resources. Consequently, it is unlikely that current knowledge of these resources will be adequately reflected in textbooks.

But education can’t be limited to what is taught in our schools. Learning about energy issues, including the pros and cons of offshore oil and natural gas, has to be a “K-through-death” experience. Education efforts can be very broad in scope, aiming at all energy consumers (i.e., the general public), and very focused as well, aiming at policymakers. Appropriate “feedback loops” need to be instituted between the larger and smaller groups to ensure that energy policy truly is *public* policy.

*Much of what the public thinks about offshore oil and natural gas is based more on anecdotal evidence (bad news, such as massive oil spills) or outright suspicion than on science. There is a perception of the offshore oil and natural gas industry as Goliath against many Davids (fishermen, the tourists industry, the environmental community).*

When people react to offshore oil and natural gas issues, they rely on their perceptions of reality, which may lack a sound grounding in the facts of the issues being debated. Most people do not have a deep understanding of offshore energy issues, and the information to which they have access - from the popular media - is usually bad news. The good news – the jobs, the products, the overall contribution to the economy, improvements in environmental protection – is either not covered or it's taken for granted because it's not "newsworthy."

Memories of the Santa Barbara oil spill remain from the 1960s and are lumped together with incidents such as the *Exxon Valdez*. It's not a question of just getting the word out that technology and safety have improved, or that tanker accidents are separate from operations and practices on an offshore drilling rig. Many people at the other end just aren't listening. Having no real reason to reconsider (such as another energy crisis), they have made up their minds and don't wish to discuss the matter further.

Furthermore, people don't distinguish between the exploration and production of offshore oil and the exploration and development of offshore natural gas. There are environmental impacts that are common to both oil and natural gas offshore, and others that are more clearly associated with one or the other, but that distinction isn't made. People living in natural gas-prone areas believe there is a risk of an oil spill when the likelihood of producing oil is negligible.

*"We" are as much a part of the problem as "they" are. Stakeholder groups – industry, the states and local communities, the environmental community, fishermen, other users of the ocean – need to be involved in outreach to our constituencies and need to commit to a dialogue.*

If the OCS Policy Committee is going to go into education and outreach, then we've got to get it right. Ultimately, we've got to have the stakeholders involved (including ourselves), and we've got to have an open and transparent process.

We need to focus on the charge of this subcommittee: Develop recommendations for a long-term education and outreach program that encourages a national dialogue with respect to the role of the outer continental shelf (OCS) in meeting our nation's energy needs. The dialogue is another form of education and outreach, like classroom learning and poster sessions. It can be conducted on many levels: stakeholder to stakeholder, stakeholder to public, public to stakeholder, politician to politician. The dialogue can determine or refine the education and outreach program's message.

This dialogue has already been underway for many years. The Outer Continental Shelf Policy Committee is one forum. The Policy Committee is composed of stakeholders who are in positions of authority regarding public policy on offshore development. Within the Policy Committee we have already discussed, at various times, where information gaps lie, what our constituents feel, the compromises that might work, and the places where we shouldn't go.

Hopefully, we've listened to and begun to appreciate those with viewpoints different from our own. We can begin weaving the threads of an education and outreach program from these discussions. The dialogue also needs to be broadened to those who believe they are not represented on the Policy Committee, to keep us honest and the message of the program objective.

*Education and outreach have been conducted by those with an interest in one outcome (more drilling) or another (less or no drilling). Existing education and outreach efforts typically are neither comprehensive nor balanced.*

The energy community, including the oil and natural gas industry, is not really "connecting" with the public and communicating what the situation is with respect to oil and natural gas. Industry is often seen as presenting one side of the issue, environmental groups the other, and government agencies such as the Department of Energy (DOE) or the Minerals Management Service (MMS) as having a stake in the outcome. They all may be dismissed as being biased, and being unable to present an objective argument or lead an objective discussion on national energy policy.

"Special interest groups" are often vilified in the media. It's very tempting for the public or even a stakeholder to characterize one or all the groups above as special, conspiratorial interests. A disagreement or even advocacy of a particular policy becomes a matter of "us vs. them." Establishing trust becomes difficult, making dialogue difficult as well.

Education and outreach must be conducted, then, by someone or some organization and/or by a process that the public *trusts*. This cannot be someone seen as having a stake in the outcome.

*An improvement in understanding will result in a more reasoned, and hopefully more balanced energy program, rather than one based on suspicion or ideology.*

One hoped-for outcome of this effort is to get people – the general public, the stakeholders, the politicians and policymakers – to be open-minded and willing to hear "the other side." That is the process of education.

We should expect to learn where our energy comes from, how offshore oil and natural gas fit into the mix, and how other sources of fossil fuels, renewables and energy conservation may modify that role. We should also expect to learn about constraints to offshore development, possible conflicts with competing ocean uses, and areas of environmental sensitivity that should be closed to oil and natural gas development. Education should be a continuous process, with new facts and information being constantly sought and disseminated to feed the process.

## Possible Approaches

*Education and outreach need to reach people's "hearts" and "minds."*

In this very fast-paced society, we have a responsibility to align ourselves with the pace of life and to align our message in a way that is easy for the mainstream public to understand and that sustains their interest.

We really need to operate on two different levels. One level is the specific information that people have, the specific understanding that they have – the facts, the brain side of it. The other one is the hearts and emotions that people bring into important issues in their lives.

Establishing a baseline has got to be the first step. We need to know what the existing attitudes and knowledge base are. This will also help in identifying the target audiences and "where they are."

There are existing models of success in education and outreach. Focus groups can be effective, as they are with natural resource issues such as the coastal wetlands of Louisiana. Focus groups can bring out what is in people's hearts and minds. Education and outreach programs for larger audiences can be ramped up from there.

The education and outreach message must be delivered honestly, openly and objectively, or it will never be accepted, either emotionally (in hearts) or intellectually (in minds).

*A national dialogue on offshore energy issues needs to be a part of education and outreach.*

We want to encourage a national dialogue. What we can do as a subcommittee is to help identify who needs to be involved in the dialogue, how to facilitate the dialogue, and how to make sure that the people who do have the different pieces of information are there to share it. The information may exist from all different sources, but what is not present is the dialogue, where people are hearing and listening and not just shouting at one another.

In terms of the dialogue, there are a lot of organized entities other than the OCS Policy Committee that already are engaged in a certain level of dialogue and they need to be identified. Those groups need to talk to each other about offshore oil and natural gas, and others not currently involved need to be drawn in. This will also help determine where the national interest and state and local interest intersect.

*The program and its message must be delivered by a credible messenger.*

People tend to believe that onshore and offshore oil and natural gas industries together try to dominate the energy scene to maintain their own market share. There is also a perception that

MMS is industry's mouthpiece. Considering the regulatory role and legitimate outreach efforts of MMS, that perception is unfortunate; however, MMS does have a vested interest in ensuring a successful and growing OCS program. It therefore has been difficult for MMS to deliver the message sought in our education and outreach program and not seem self-serving.

While the offshore energy industries and MMS cannot "manage" the message, it is appropriate for them to participate in the dialogue along with other stakeholders, including the Department of Energy.

That said, we still need to recognize some of the successes MMS has had in raising awareness, for example among science teachers, of ocean resources including oil and natural gas. We should review and consider adapting them for further education and outreach even as we look for someone else to deliver the message. This would include information about the role of the OCS in supplying energy and its environmental impact.

But, again – someone or some group recognized universally as a neutral party must be the one to deliver the message.

*The message delivered must be consistent, though the audiences may be different.*

When conducting education and outreach and dialogue, we've got to get the message right, and be consistent on that message - staying on the message, delivering it every place that makes sense, and then having a way to tell if we've made a difference in improving the public's understanding of the issues and their thought processes for arriving at opinions.

Clearly, different approaches will be employed for different audiences. We're going to have a different delivery system for the local governments than we do for schoolchildren and teachers, but the message will be the same – just with a different delivery system.

There may be different approaches for different regions, too. Clearly Texas, for example, in general has a different attitude than Florida. The message still needs to stay the same.

There are many different kinds of activities that could be pursued to deliver the message. These include big, splashy media events; quieter, lower-level kinds of information dissemination; poster sessions like those conducted by MMS; and alliances with different entities, such as large energy consumers (big companies) that can communicate the message to their employees via company newsletters.

## **Expected Outcomes**

*The education and outreach program should result in an increase in public awareness of the role of offshore oil and natural gas in meeting energy needs – and the constraints to developing it.*

From there, the public should be better equipped to advise elected officials and policymakers of their support or opposition to current OCS policies.

*What the ensuing dialogue might mean is that there may be places in currently open, non-moratorium areas that we might decide should be closed, just as logically as we might decide that some places in moratorium areas should be opened.*

There must be no “pre-determined” outcome to the dialogue that is accompanying our education and outreach efforts. That dialogue should be entered into with the understanding that a consensus might be reached to lift, altar, or sustain the moratoria. Or, the consensus could be to open certain areas, close others, and maintain the status quo in the rest.

Those who wish to participate in the dialogue need to be comfortable with that, if they’re going to ask “the other side” either to open or to close areas to development. To work in good faith, the dialogue has to proceed from the assumption that all these results are equally plausible. In other words, “it’s got to go both ways.” Nobody is going to be willing to buy into the dialogue if you’re asking just one side to be willing to come to the table and give up something.

## **Education and Outreach Subcommittee Charter (Adopted by the Subcommittee on February 20, 2002)**

### **Charter**

This Subcommittee on Education and Outreach is established by the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) Policy Committee of the Minerals Management Advisory Board. The purpose of this subcommittee is to develop recommendations for the Secretary of the Interior for a long-term education and outreach program that encourages a national dialogue about the role of the OCS in meeting our Nation's energy needs.

On June 5, 2001 the OCS Policy Committee (OCSPC) sent a letter to the Secretary of the Interior making a number of recommendations to encourage increasing natural gas production from the OCS. Included was recommendation #6: "Encourage congressional funding for additional education and outreach regarding the leasing program."

The Secretary responded to the OCSPC on all 12 recommendations. For recommendation #6 the response was: "The Department is interested in working with the Committee on developing education and outreach opportunities. Please work with MMS, possibly as part of future Committee deliberations, to consider specific initiatives."

This assessment by the subcommittee will help guide the Secretary of the Interior and the Minerals Management Service (MMS) in identifying opportunities, regional and national, for building consensus. The subcommittee will assess previous and current education and outreach programs.

The aim of the subcommittee's efforts is to identify potential opportunities and assist the Department and the MMS in exploring program and policy options to develop a dialogue about the role of the OCS in meeting our Nation's energy needs in cooperation with coastal states. A state might identify the stakeholders that need to be involved in a dialogue. In many states, where there is no activity, there is limited knowledge. The subcommittee may suggest actions that MMS, the industry, and others can take, including short term and long term efforts, to enhance current outreach efforts. Consideration should be given to involving congressional delegations in any proposed plan. During the course of its work, the subcommittee will keep the Policy Committee apprised of information links and sources for information that may be of interest.

Recognizing that education and outreach takes a concerted effort, the work of this subcommittee may extend over several OCSPC meetings. The subcommittee should, however, develop a position paper to include observations and some recommendations for the OCS Policy Committee to review and discuss at the May 2002 meeting.

**Members**

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